

**ENCOUNTERING GRACE IN GUILT:  
THE HEALING EXPERIENCE**

**A Professional Project**

**Presented to**

**the Faculty of the**

**School of Theology at Claremont**

**In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

### Encountering Grace in Guilt: The Healing Experience

Richard Lamar Horton

For nearly two decades, the book market has been flooded with popular psychology of the "I'm O.K., you're O.K." variety. However, a careful reading of such books -- and the pastoral observations of this writer -- reveal that in a significant instance, I am not O.K. nor are a number of persons within congregations.

The significant instance involves the feelings persons identify as guilt, and the cause is frequently traced to a lack of understanding of the nature of guilt. The shortcoming in the "I'm O.K., you're O.K." material is that it encourages the avoidance of feelings of guilt, as though such feelings, in and of themselves, are wrong.

Therefore, the crucial question addressed in this project is how a model can be established that will enable persons to own their guilt and be led by such feelings to release by experiencing God's grace. The model chosen has for its beginning a discussion on the genesis of guilt. From there, the writer explains the ways in which guilt manifests itself, and presents a discussion on guilt from theological and psychological

perspectives. In order to avoid presenting a problem without a cure, the next additions to the model will examine the genesis of grace, how guilt and grace are held in tension in preaching that is true to the gospel, and how grace is encountered in guilt to heal and restore.

The model is intended to heighten the awareness that we all have "clay feet" and that God made provision for our clay feet in sending Jesus Christ to die for our sins and arise for our justification (author's paraphrase). Finally, the model proposes that grace makes possible significant, meaningful living beyond guilt.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction

The thesis of this project is that guilt improperly understood blinds one to the power of grace to operate for forgiveness and healing. Therefore, a thorough discussion on the nature of guilt will be presented in order to present the nature of guilt in the clearest possible light, thereby enabling an understanding of the nature of guilt and generating an enlightened decision relative to it.

The importance of this problem lies in the extent to which persons will go to deny guilt feelings without realizing that, the more they resist owning the feelings of guilt, the more the feelings persist -- either on a conscious or subconscious level. A case in point is a conversation I had on an airplane with a flight attendant. When our conversation reached the point of asking me about the nature of my work (at which time I stated that I am a clergyman), the attendant began to explain why she kept changing churches until she found the one just right for her. It was a church where the word sin was never used and where the doctrine of original sin was refuted. As the conversation proceeded, it became clear

to me why she chose a church where the thought of sin and discussion of the notion of original sin are treated as non-realities. To imply that there is sin is to imply that one is capable of doing wrong. To imply that there is a doctrine of original sin is to imply that one has clay feet and will do something wrong. Such implications result in feelings of guilt which make one uncomfortable and deny that there is such a thing as human perfection. So, get rid of sin and anything that implies that human beings have a sinful nature, and one need never experience guilt feelings.

It is important for one to experience guilt feelings. Imperfect creatures, living in an imperfect world, need to know when they have done wrong or when they are experiencing guilt feelings for no justifiable reason. Guilt, in and of itself, is a healthy response. Guilt feelings are a healthy response to wrong. There is unhealthy guilt, but one cannot understand the health or unhealthiness of his guilt feelings until he claims and owns the feelings. Then he can proceed to find release through confession or through realizing that the guilt he is feeling is unreal and should be discarded.

The flight attendant could have been spared her running from church to church had she understood that it is O.K. to feel guilt because

guilt is not an end in itself but the means to an end -- the experience of the grace of God to forgive, renew and restore. Avoidance of guilt leads to self hatred; acceptance of guilt leads to remorse and self acceptance. Avoidance of guilt leads to the lack of the necessary understanding and wisdom which will cause one to ignore the repeated pain experienced from repeating the same mistakes. Acceptance of guilt will help one experience the necessary pain which can save one from making the same mistake. The very thing that one avoids is the thing one allows to control him.

If the people who are the church are to do their work effectively, powerfully and graciously, their understanding of the problem of guilt and the nature of grace is essential. To this end, this project is directed.

The methodology employed in this project to address the problem of guilt and the nature of grace is as follows. Views on the origin of guilt are presented from the perspective of two authorities from the field of psychiatry, and one from the field of theology. The psychiatrists are Sigmund Freud and Paul Tournier; the theologian is Paul Tillich. After discussing the origin of guilt, a chapter is devoted to examining how guilt manifests itself.

Next, preaching models are critiqued for the purpose of demonstrating how guilt and grace can be held in tension, in preaching, so that neither guilt nor grace achieves the upper hand but a balance is maintained. In the last chapter, the results are presented from a survey conducted among the people of Eternal Promise Baptist Church, located in Los Angeles, to point out that the experience of grace does heal guilt when consciousness raising is done to help people understand how grace encounters them in their experiences of guilt and heals them.

The subject of this project is so broad that the writer has limited the discussion to only those authorities in the field of psychiatry and preaching, and to those subject areas and persons, whose works and contributions are germane to the intentions of this project.

The procedure for integrating theory with practice for the good of the congregation this writer serves is done in the following manner. In regard to theory, the discussion focuses on statements of Sigmund Freud, Paul Tournier and Paul Tillich. Further attention to theory also examines statements by Reinhold Niebuhr, Emil Brunner and John G. McKenzie. In the area of preaching, sermons by C. Gardner Taylor, Paul Tillich and

the writer provide glimpses of the theoretical approach which is employed to address the subject of this project.

Materials presented from the congregational survey illustrate how theory and practice come together in a beneficial way. For it is out of the writer's understanding of the problem of guilt and the nature of grace that an instrument (survey) was developed whereby theory is put into practice -- the cerebral is connected to the visceral (the brain to the gut) -- for the growth and well being of the people of God. To that end this project is also directed.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Genesis of Guilt

Ink, pens, pencils, typewriter keys, minds and energies have been exhausted by persons seeking to comprehend the origin of guilt. Numerous authorities, in various fields, profess to know its origin. However, this project analyzes the work of two psychiatrists and one theologian as authorities: Sigmund Freud, Paul Tournier, and Paul Tillich.

According to David K. Switzer, Sigmund Freud laid the groundwork for the understanding of guilt as anxiety by tracing the origin of guilt feelings to the Oedipus complex.<sup>1</sup> Freud's Oedipus complex is derived from a figure in Greek mythology who, out of his incestuous desire for his mother, killed his father and married his mother. It is Freud's contention that the male child, between the ages of five and twelve, has a similar desire for his mother.

Conflict arises, however, in the boy when he realizes his ambivalence towards his father, who is also an object of love, but who stands in the way of the child's fulfilling his sexual desires with his mother. At this point in the male child's life, the "super-ego" or conscious is developed. Simply put,

the super-ego in this sense is symbolized in the father; the child's response to the father is guilt (anxiety). It is the child's guilt which causes the fear of his father (super-ego). The guilt of the child stems from the fear that his father knows of his sexual desire for his mother and that his father will castrate him (castration fear) if he does not abandon his incestuous craving. The male child, at this point in his development, feeling that the only way to maintain closeness to his mother is through his penis, represses or abandons his sexual desires for her.

Whereas "castration fear" in the male child resolves the Oedipus complex, "penis envy" in the female child gives rise to the Oedipus complex.

The emergence of the castration complex in the boy is the principle reason why the Oedipus complex is abandoned, while in the girl the "castration complex" (penis envy) is responsible for the introduction of the Oedipus complex. She loves her father and is jealous of her mother. Although the female Oedipus complex is not as likely to disappear as in the male's, it does become weaker by virtue of maturation and the impossibility of possessing the father.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in the Oedipus complex, feelings of anxiety arise in the child, male and female, which are interpreted as guilt. A mechanism is also developed in the personality at the same time, according to Freud, to serve as an inducer of guilt feelings for the duration of life when ethical taboos

are violated by the person, be they taboos induced from societal or cultural mores or tenets of one's religious faith.

It was the Freudian school of psychology which produced the thesis that guilt is derived from the violation of taboos. Drawing upon a thesis developed by Charles Odier, a French psychologist, that determinations have to be made about guilt (i.e., as to its true or false nature), Paul Tournier made his significant contribution on this subject in his book entitled Guilt and Grace. Tournier acknowledges his high regard for the thesis of Odier. According to Tournier, Odier, in addressing the subject of guilt, makes a distinction between "functional guilt" and "value guilt."

Functional guilt is one which results from social suggestion, fear of taboos or of losing the love of others. A feeling of value guilt is the genuine consciousness of having betrayed an authentic standard; it is the free judgment of the self by the self.<sup>3</sup>

The thought to be drawn from this is that all guilt is experienced subjectively. "Functional guilt" (false guilt, neurotic guilt), however, is experienced only subjectively. There is nothing objective about "functional guilt." There is nothing to which the one who experiences it can point to as its cause. Therefore, it is called "false guilt."



"Value guilt," on the other hand, is experienced subjectively and objectively. There is the subjective feeling of guilt and the objective reality of its cause. In "value guilt" (true guilt, healthy guilt), there is a specific incident or situation which accounts for its anxiety producing intensity. This in turn allows the individual to own it, accept responsibility for it, and be released from it. For example, one person hurts another. The subjective feeling of the one who inflicts the pain is guilt. The object of the subjective feeling of guilt is the person who was hurt, and the pain caused. Therefore, if the inflictor of pain confesses the wrong, the guilt is gone.

It is at this point that Tournier makes his significant contribution on this subject. Whereas others before him have noted the sources of guilt, the interpretation of its sources, and its distinguishing features, it is Paul Tournier who affirms that guilt -- regardless of its source, interpretation, or distinguishing characteristics -- has value and significance.

All human conduct, however genuine it may be from a moral point of view, can be considered as functional, that is it may be studied objectively with a concern for the mechanism of its origin. Conversely, even a neurotic syndrome which is functional in Odier's sense, may be, for the subject, the occasion for a genuine religious experience of divine grace. There are many instances in the lives of the saints.<sup>4</sup>

It is also worth noting that Tournier proceeds from here and significantly points out that the psychologist is not only obliged to understand the insights gained from his own discipline of study, relative to evaluating the nature of guilt in the human creature, but he is also obliged to seek to understand the view that the Bible brings to this matter.

According to Tournier:

Medical outlook must therefore incorporate the religious outline of the specific character of man. In the light of the Bible, "true" guilt appears as guilt toward God, a breakdown in the order of man's dependency upon God. . . . guilt towards God is the religious language of the Bible. Thus the true guilt of men comes from the things with which they are reproached by God in their innermost hearts. . . . "False guilt" is that which comes as a result of the judgements of and suggestions of men. True guilt is that which results from divine judgment. . . . The only true guilt is not to depend on God, and on God alone.<sup>5</sup>

For Tournier then, the true nature of guilt ultimately lies not in one's sense of real wrong or imaginary wrong done to others, but in whether or not what was done was in keeping with or in contradiction to the will of God.

And here we can grasp the truth of a great importance: the objective reality of the wrong done to others cannot make guilt genuine. The distinction between "false" and "true" guilt is in no way the distinction between an imaginary and real wrong done to others. The criterion is quite different. It must be

known whether the conduct was contrary to or in accordance with the will of God.<sup>6</sup>

Tournier's contribution to the subject of guilt is to point out that guilt is not without its redeeming features. He also raises the understanding of "true guilt" from its human origin to its divine origin.

From the perspective of Paul Tillich, guilt originates in the failure of humankind to fulfill its destiny, that is, in the failure of individuals to be what they can be. According to Tillich,

Man's being, ontic as well as spiritual, is not only given to him but demanded of him. He is responsible for it; literally, he is required to answer, if he is asked, what he has made of himself. He who asks is his judge, namely himself, who at the same time stands against him.<sup>7</sup>

Because individuals are free to determine their destinies, to fail to do so is to experience guilt. On this point, Tillich further states:

Man is essentially "finite freedom," freedom not in the sense of indeterminacy but in the sense of being able to determine himself through decisions in the center of his being. Man, as finite freedom, is free within contingencies of his finitude. But within these limits he is asked to make of himself what he is supposed to become, fulfill his destiny.<sup>8</sup>

In Tillich's writings, guilt is experienced as "estrangement" and "estrangement is the consequence of sin."<sup>9</sup> As Tillich states, "Man's predicament is estrangement, but his estrangement is sin."<sup>10</sup> Tillich feels

that the word "sin" should be preserved, or held on to, because it denotes personal responsibility for "estrangement." On this point he states:

The word sin cannot be overlooked. It expresses what is not implied in the term "estrangement," namely, the personal act of turning away from that to which one belongs. . . . The word sin can and must be saved . . . because the word has a sharpness which accusingly points to the element of personal responsibility in one's estrangement.<sup>11</sup>

Tillich, after defining sin as "estrangement," holds up three categories in which estrangement manifests itself. They are: (1) unbelief, "the disruption of man's cognitive participation in God;" (2) hubris, "self elevation, making self the center of one's world;"<sup>12</sup> and (3) "concupiscence" or "the unlimited desire to draw the whole of reality into one's self."<sup>13</sup>

For the Freudian school, guilt has its source in the anxiety which arises out of the Oedipus complex. Though Freud distinguished between three aspects of anxiety, "Reality Anxiety," "Neurotic Anxiety," and "Moral Anxiety," he did not specifically label guilt as "true guilt" or "false guilt." This was the contribution of Tournier. For Tournier, to disobey God and to depend upon anyone or anything other than God is the source of "true guilt." From Tillich's perspective, guilt has its source in the experience of "estrangement" from God who is one's true self. Individual potential (destiny) cannot be actualized if cut-off from the true self.

With this discussion of the origin of guilt as a foundation, the ways in which guilt is manifest can be examined. The next chapter will discuss the ways in which guilt manifests itself.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **The Manifestation of Guilt**

Judith Viorst discusses four major areas in which guilt manifests itself in the human personality.<sup>1</sup> These four areas are: excessive guilt; unconscious guilt; guilt deficiency; and psycho-pathology. They will form the basis upon which the following discussion of the various manifestations of guilt is built.

#### **Excessive Guilt**

Persons who suffer from excessive guilt reveal their guilt feelings in extreme ways. There is no limit to the incidents or things that will induce guilt in them. A woman who is a parishioner of an Episcopal church recalls what happened during one Sunday morning service. The rector was preaching on the theme, "The Lord Will Provide." Touched and inspired by what was said from the pulpit, the woman said, with all of the emotional fervor she could muster, "Amen." Realizing what she had done, she turned to the congregation and said, "I'm sorry." She felt guilty for her feelings and for being different than those around her.

This form of guilt is manifested in many ways in daily life. The wife who suffers from excessive guilt feels guilty when her husband is unhappy. The husband who suffers from excessive guilt feels guilty when he cannot satisfy all of the whims and wishes of his wife. Most individuals know persons who suffer from excessive guilt. Even pastors, such as this writer, have their moments:

- When things do not go well at church I feel guilty.
- When all is not well with my wife and children, I feel guilty.
- When I have to be away from the congregation for periods of time, I feel guilty.
- When I feel I am needed but am not available, I feel guilty.

These are examples of excessive guilt. There are also definitive titles for the examples which further identify excessive guilt feelings and clarify how they operate in a person's life.

### **Indiscriminate Guilt**

One of the side effects of excessive guilt is called "indiscriminate guilt." Persons who suffer from "indiscriminate guilt" are persons who feel that to wish something is to make something happen, or to think

something is to do something. In such instances, there is no distinguishing between thought and deed. If one wishes someone ill and illness befalls that person, the one who wished the ill feels responsible even though nothing was actually done to bring about the misfortune. An individual who thinks a bad thought feels guilty for having done what went no further than a thought. Guilt which fails to discriminate also fails to realize that wishing does not make it so, nor does thinking cause something to happen.

### **Disproportionate Punitiveness**

Another way "excessive guilt" is displayed is when the punishment does not fit the crime. This is caused by one not being realistic regarding a wrong which is done. One does not shoot oneself for stepping on someone's shoes; an apology is all that is necessary. One does not commit suicide for hurting another's feelings; one apologizes. One does not endlessly punish oneself for making a mistake; one accepts the finitude of human beings and gets on with life. When people, through excessive guilt feelings, disproportionately punish themselves, the self afflicting behavior



is out of proportion to the actual wrong which was done. An apology or self acceptance is needed -- not self mortification.

This excessive punishing guilt is somewhat like pouring a whole cup of salt on an egg salad sandwich. No one is disputing that perhaps the sandwich needs salt but -- not that much salt.<sup>2</sup>

### Omnipotent Guilt

A Psalmist wrote, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me."<sup>3</sup> Excessive guilt in its omnipotent manifestation reveals itself in presumptuousness in that the excessively guilty person presumes to be in control of everything and is therefore responsible for things that go wrong.

Omnipotent guilt . . . rests on the illusion of control -- the illusion, for example, that we have absolute power over our loved ones' well being. And so, if they suffer or fail or fall in body soul or mind, we have no doubt that we are to blame, that had we done it differently or had we done it better, we surely would have been able to prevent it.<sup>4</sup>

This writer is acquainted with a woman who holds herself responsible for her son's death. She and her husband were going out of town for a weekend, and the husband did not want to leave the son with a set of keys to the family car. She persuaded him to do so. While they were away the son engaged in a race with another car, lost control of his car, and was

killed in the accident. The woman feels that she is responsible because she insisted that the son be allowed to drive while they were away. In many instances where deaths occur -- whether by accident or by natural causes -- there is the feeling on the part of the survivors that some action on their part could have prevented the death.

The reason that control is so important is because it keeps a person from feeling helpless. When a person feels knowledgeable about why something happened, that person also feels in control to keep it from happening again. This provides reassurance that an individual has "life-controlling powers" or, at least, maintains the illusion. The fact of the matter is that no one else is totally responsible for things not going well for a person or for mandating someone's happiness or well-being. Excessive guilt feelings, however, will cause one to be too indiscriminate in judgment, too disproportionate in response to self, and too omnipotent in self delusion to realize this.

### **Unconscious Guilt**

The above discussion illustrates some of the ways in which excessive guilt may manifest itself. In contrast, unconscious guilt is revealed in

other ways. Unconscious guilt works on an individual without that person's conscious knowledge. An accident may not be just an accident, but an unconscious need for self punishment. A bump on the head, a cut finger, a banged foot, a wrecked car, sabotaged happiness, an undermined goal, may be the result of an unconscious need for punishment. This is also seen in self-directing evidence left behind at the scene of a crime. Some psychologists have even suggested that Richard Nixon left the Watergate tapes behind out of an unconscious need to be punished.

This writer once counseled a married man who unconsciously carried a tube of his girlfriend's lipstick home in his jacket pocket. Actually, it is not unusual for this writer to counsel persons who, at the point of having a happy experience or accomplishing something satisfying and fulfilling, do something to sabotage it out of an unconscious need to punish themselves. There is, in such actions, a strong sense of self hatred which gives birth to an equally strong sense that one is undeserving of happiness and well being.

### Guilt Deficiency

Of all the manifestations of guilt, perhaps the area in which the largest number of people fall is this: a deficiency in the capacity to feel guilt. Such persons will not allow themselves to feel guilty. If a husband, who suffers from this is told to pick up something from the store on his way home, and he fails to reach the store before it closes, he will say, "They closed the store on me." He will never admit that he was negligent in getting there on time. A wife, who has this problem, could be told on Monday to pick up theater tickets for a Friday performance. When Friday comes, and tickets are not available, she will say, "They sold out of tickets." She will never admit that she did not purchase them on Monday, but waited until the last minute on Friday. To acknowledge otherwise is to experience guilt feelings. A teenager who suffers from this syndrome, when he has an accident with the family car, will say, "The car ran into. . . ." To say that he had an accident would be to admit wrong doing which is also to experience guilt.

People who have a deficiency when it comes to the capacity to experience guilt are also people who blame circumstances for their lack of achievement. They can be heard to say: "I am the child of a single parent;"

or "I am a victim of racism;" or "I was a latch-key kid;" or "I grew up in poverty;" or "I come from a dysfunctional family;" or "I was mentally abused by a disinterested educational system." The list is endless.

Another example of the subterfuge used to avoid guilt feelings is illustrated in the following quotation:

I am reminded of our liberation (and of my old-fashioned teacher) when I read Dr. Laurel Richardson's study *The New Other Women*. One of Dr. Richardson's major findings is that an affair with a married man is no longer deemed to be so terrible. More than 40 percent of married men report affairs, and with those of incomes over \$70,000.00 the figure is 70 percent. She reports, as well, that women involved in such affairs did not regard affairs with other women's husbands as "a sin, a grievance or a breach of sisterhood." They tend to think of marriage as temporary, considering the divorce rate, and of the wife as non-existent. "If his wife does not exist, she cannot have feelings. . . ." "If she does not have feelings, she cannot be hurt, and if she cannot be hurt, there is no reason to feel guilty."<sup>5</sup>

The new woman, as described here, is one who negates the married women, or her lover, or her personhood in order not to experience guilt feelings.

Recently I attended a meeting on gang violence during which it was pointed out that the black gangs, namely the Crips and the Bloods, control the drug traffic in Los Angeles. Attached to this is the story of a 21-year-old gang member who was arrested. Among his assets, at the time

of his arrest, were a BMW 735, a Mercedes 450SL, a Chevy Corvette and a Rolls Royce Silver Spurr. All of these cars were of the current model year and he had paid cash for each, except the Rolls Royce, on which he had only made a \$35,000 down payment. It was also pointed out that he owned controlling interest in a motel that had recently been built in South Central Los Angeles. This young man need feel no guilt. After all, he is just trying to make money and get ahead.

Clues to understanding deficiencies in one's capacity to feel guilt are provided in the first instance by Karl Menninger who notes that when we did away with "sin" we did away with the need to feel guilt and its companion -- the conscience.<sup>6</sup> According to Menninger, the demise of sin began when sin became a crime. Its death occurred when a crime became an illness. Sin was buried and laid to rest when its usage was replaced by euphemisms, such as, "immorality," "unethical," and "anti-social behavior." Who needs to take personal responsibility for wrong when there is no more sin? With sin gone, who needs a conscience or needs to keep company with the companion of conscience -- guilt?

The second clue to understanding guilt deficiency comes from the mind of the writer of this project. I submit that people who deny feelings

of guilt, by transferring the blame, are people who at one time were severely punished or humiliated for admitting to being wrong. Of course, they are also people with very low self-esteem, but who also had a substantial amount of help getting their self-esteem lowered. The consequences of being wrong are just too painful for them. Therefore, they have become convinced that it is not safe to say "I had an accident," but rather, "The car had an accident." This is observed in church people who live the illusion of being puritans for fear of how God would punish them for doing wrong, and for fear that no one will like or accept them if they truly knew their down sitting, and their up-rising, and were acquainted with all their ways. (The writer's paraphrase of Ps. 139:1-2.) This is one of the reasons why parents lie to children and children lie to parents, and why people lie to one another in general. The assumed consequence of being wrong accounts for the ways people protect themselves from one another in marriage by concealing their true feelings and sensitivities on issues, by saying "yes" when they mean "no" and "no" when they mean "yes."

The wrong in this reaction is that the people who experience deficiencies in the capacity to feel guilt are people who know the difference

between right and wrong. They are not psychopaths -- just people for whom being wrong is not safe. They are people who, in other words, need a safe place where they can be wrong. Perhaps the most tragic aspect of people who suffer this malady is that the conscience in them serves only to punish but not to prevent.

### The Psychopath

As previously discussed, there are some persons who feel too much guilt, who cannot discriminate between thought and deed, who punish themselves disproportionately in connection to the wrongs they commit, and who suffer guilty feelings due to the illusion that they have absolute power to keep their loved ones from being harmed in any way. There are also those who suffer from unconscious guilt feelings as well as those who are deficient in their capacity to feel guilt. But there are also psychopaths -- persons who cannot perceive guilt in any degree. The only beneficial service the psychopath renders to society is to serve as a reminder of the value of having a conscience and the capacity to experience guilt. The psychopath is an example of what the world would be like if it did not have people with guilt induced consciences.



As pointed out by Viorst:

There are, however, the so-called psychopathic personalities who seem to display a genuine lack of guilt, whose antisocial and criminal acts, whose repetitive acts of destructiveness and depravity occur with no restraint or remorse. These psychopaths cheat and rob and lie and damage and destroy with remarkable emotional impunity. These psychopaths spell out for us, in letters ten feet high, what kind of world this would be without guilt.<sup>7</sup>

Another example of the psychopathology present in American society is illuminated in a report issued by the Department of Social Service of the State of California. It states the following:

From January 1989 to September 1989, a total of 404,682 children were abused and/or neglected in the State of California. . . . 70,976 were sexually abused; 116,836 were physically abused; 35,121 were severely neglected; 125,322 suffered general neglect; 14,827 suffered emotional abuse; 1,489 were exploited; 40,111 were victims of caretaker abuse or incapacity.<sup>8</sup>

This report also points out that:

70% of all runaways are fleeing an abusive environment; 97% of hardcore delinquents have a history of child abuse; 80% of all prostitutes were sexually abused as children; 80% of prison inmates were abused as children.<sup>9</sup>

This psychopathology is also manifested in the violence that affects the whole of society as persons find that they can no longer keep their homes safe from burglars nor be safe in them.

Burglars used to rob a house and then run away. Now they urinate and defecate in the house or burn it before leaving. . . . Thieves mugged a person and ran off. Now they beat their victims, or rape or murder them.<sup>10</sup>

There is hope for our society as long as we have people who can feel and manifest guilt in any form, even though it may be at an unconscious level or is too painful for them to admit. The psychopath, however, is a menace to civilization as well as his first cousin, that is, those who turn over their moral responsibilities to persons or groups. Such actions have given rise to lynch mobs, to enslavement of people, to mass murder and to all forms of dehumanization. The manifestation of guilt is healthy; the lack of guilt feelings is unhealthy.

Without guilt  
What is man? An animal, isn't he?  
A wolf forgiven at his meat,  
A beetle innocent in his copulation?<sup>11</sup>

## CHAPTER 4

### Definition of Major Terms

Words relevant to the subject under discussion and requiring definition are sin, guilt, confession, repentance and forgiveness.

1. Sin: In defining sin, corroborating definitions are given from three theologians and three psychologists. According to Reinhold Niebuhr, sin is the refusal of man to own his finitude. "Sin is occasioned precisely by the fact that man refuses to admit his 'creatureliness' and to acknowledge himself as merely a member of the total unity of life. He pretends to be more than he is."<sup>1</sup> Man's pretension to be more than he is has been further illustrated by Niebuhr when he states that "the evil in man is a consequence of his unwillingness to acknowledge his dependence, to accept his finiteness, to admit his insecurity."<sup>2</sup>

Emil Brunner puts forth this definition of sin:

Sin is rebellion against God and separation from Him. Sin, fundamentally is the revolt of the creature against the creator, the attempt of the creature to escape from dependence on God in order not to be under God, and related to God but to be without God, that is, not only to be conditionally, but unconditionally free. Not worldly pleasure, but the striving for unconditional freedom; the striving to be autonomous; the will of the tenant to be lord, is the root of sin.<sup>3</sup>

After defining sin, both Niebuhr and Brunner are quick to point out that the essence/nature of man is not evil but that his rebellious acts reveal that man is prone to sin, though he is essentially good. Niebuhr states it this way: "The essence of man is freedom. Sin is committed in that freedom."<sup>4</sup> Because evil is placed at the center of the human personality -- in the human will, the center of thought and action -- it is Niebuhr's contention that man, in his essence (freedom) chooses to disobey God. In disobeying God, man reveals his proneness to sin. "Sin can therefore not be attributed to a defect in his essence. It can only be understood as a self-contradiction, made possible by the fact of his freedom, but not following necessarily from it."<sup>5</sup>

On the matter of man's essential goodness but proneness to sin, Brunner states:

The personalism of the Biblical message comes out in the fact that it describes man, in sin as in faith, not primarily in the category of being but of act. The sinful act does not spring from the sinful nature, but the sinful nature is to be understood in the light of the sinful act. . . . Sin is primarily a personal attitude; only in a secondary sense is it a natural definition.<sup>6</sup>

The writer of this project provides the third theological definition of sin. That definition employs the following acronyms: E.G.O. and I.S.I. --

edging God out and installing self in. Evil is located at the very center of the human personality -- the will. Therefore, when God is edged out and the self is enthroned, evil is the victor over goodness, injustice is the victor over righteousness, rebelliousness is the victor over obedience, unbelief is the victor over faith, dejection is the victor over hope, hate is the victor over love, the arrogant dominate the compassionate and the cruel crush the kind and gentle. The surest way to banish God from life is to put self at the center of one's life -- the human will, where one thinks and acts. The surest way to destroy the potential of human and Divine relationships is to put self at the place where God is to be -- the very center of the human personality, the human will -- frequently referred to in the Christian Bible as the heart.

John G. McKenzie, prior to giving his definition of sin from a psychological perspective, shares two other psychologists' definitions of sin. One is from J. A. Hardfield and the other is from H. R. MacIntosh. According to Hardfield, "Sin is a deliberate and conscious choice of the will moved by a false or wrong idea."<sup>7</sup> From MacIntosh's perspective, "Sin is essentially selfishness. . . . the wrong attitude of the will. . . . the distinctive quality in sin lies not chiefly in its analogy to higher life, or to

the welfare of society, but in its antagonism to the will of the living God."<sup>8</sup>

For McKenzie, sin is egocentricity. He writes:

From the psychological point of view . . . . the root of sin is egocentricity . . . . the extremely ego centered person consciously or unconsciously makes himself his own purpose. . . . Sin, then, is egocentricity; and we are sinners to the degree in which our attitude is egocentric.<sup>9</sup>

2. Guilt: One of the clearest indications that one has acquired a conscience is the capacity to experience guilt. This guilt producing mechanism, called the conscience, limits and restrains one and informs one about what is valued and what is abhorred. Judith Viorst puts it this way:

Our conscience is our parents installed in our mind. Later identification with teachers and preachers, with friends, with super stars and heroes, will modify what we value and what we forbid.<sup>10</sup>

Be that as it may, the feeling that is produced by it is guilt. William Gaylin speaks of guilt as

A form of self disappointment. It is a sense of anguish that we did not achieve our standard of what we ought to be. We have fallen short. We have somehow betrayed some internal sense of self. . . . Guilt is the most internalized and personal emotion. You against you allows no buffer and no villains except oneself.<sup>11</sup>

Again, on the definition of guilt, Gaylin continues:

Guilt . . . has a dimension that is rooted in the emotions and a dimension that is rooted in the intellect. Guilt is a pain in the gut and a pain in the mind. The visceral pain of guilt finds its creative outlet in the catalytic feeling of remorse, a deeply emotional experience that induces profound change.<sup>12</sup>

3. Confession: Confession is the acknowledgement of guilt and the need to expose the wrong done and to be expiated. From the psychological perspective, another term for confession is catharsis.

4. Repentance: Two Greek verbs are combined for the common understanding of repentance -- epistrephein and metanoein. The former describes the practical changes while the latter addresses the interior change in the person. Both call for a turning from evil and a turning towards God. Both call for more than just remorse but for a definite change in attitude, disposition and behavior. When remorse is taken for repentance, one is likely to find himself committing the same wrong again as soon as his tears have dried-up and the fear of getting caught is gone because he has not truly repented -- that is, changed his mind. When one changes his mind about a wrong, the wrong deed loses its power to seduce him.

5. Forgiveness: One of the meanings of freedom is forgiveness. The forgiven is free of the burden of guilt and the fear of reprisal or judgment. The forgiver is freed from the need to settle old scores and from the pain induced by unexpressed hurt. The forgiver, in other words, is no longer held hostage to bitterness and hate. The supreme saving act of God, in Christ Jesus, is forgiveness. The good news which is to be proclaimed is that there is forgiveness and remission of sin.

In defining forgiveness and pointing out its benefits, the fact that forgiveness is supernatural must also be underscored. P. T. Forsyth does well in doing this when he writes:

Real forgiveness is not natural. Nor is it natural and easy to consent to be forgiven. . . . We should then have a better hold of the forgiveness of God. . . . Nay, if there is one thing in the world forever supernatural it is real forgiveness. . . . It is natural only to the supernatural.<sup>13</sup>

P. T. Forsyth states the supernaturalness of forgiveness. The following quotation does equally well in illustrating forgiveness' the supernatural nature of forgiveness.

Mine is the most peaceable disposition. My wishes are: a humble cottage with a thatched roof, but a good bed, good food, the freshest of milk and butter, flowers before my windows, and a few fine trees before my door; and if God wants to make my happiness complete, he will grant me the joy of seeing some six or seven of my enemies hanging from those trees. Before



their death I shall, moved in my heart, forgive them all the wrong they did me in their life time. One must, it is true, forgive one's enemies, but not before they have been hanged.<sup>14</sup>

## CHAPTER 5

### In the Beginning: Grace

As stated earlier in this project, the purpose is to present a model to serve as an aid in the church to assure members that guilt is a healthy and beneficial human experience that need not have excessive control over their lives. Nor, need it to be repressed to an unconscious level where it causes us to attack ourselves and sabotage our well being. Nor need any one live in denial of guilt due to painful experiences associated with guilt because there is the grace of God that remits, forgives, heals and restores. One is not to sin "that grace may abound." But also, neither is one to be unrealistic about the nature of sin nor repressive with his wrong that guilt may abound -- bringing in its trail the attitudes and feeling that destroy divine and human relationships.

The genesis of guilt in the human personality has been discussed according to Freud, Tournier, and Tillich. But the genesis of grace, from the Biblical perspective, must also be understood since in this project guilt is the malady, though necessary at times, and grace is the cure -- vital for all circumstances and conditions.

Action precedes definition. Something happens and then the human mind invents a word that best communicates what has been experienced -- the finite seeking to communicate the infinite. The word chosen to define the good that happens is grace. The word grace describes something that money cannot buy, labor cannot earn, charm cannot lure, cunning cannot persuade, and piety cannot dictate.

Though grace is explicitly a New Testament word, its implicit use is very present in the Old Testament. Therefore, this discussion begins with the Old Testament for an account of the origin of grace.

And you shall make response before the Lord your God, A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord the God of our fathers and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders.<sup>1</sup>

For one who has a cursory knowledge of the Bible, this text from the Book of Deuteronomy is, perhaps, an odd place to start the story of the genesis of God's grace. After all, there is the creation narrative in Genesis. Is not the creation of the heavens and the earth an act of grace? Was it not grace that took what was formless and gave it shape? Was it not grace

that took what was void and filled it with meaning and purpose? Did not grace bring light out of darkness, put in place everything necessary to nurture, protect, support and sustain life -- then create human life? Yes is the answer to these inquiries. But the fact of the matter is this: grace had to first establish a community of faith to witness to the wonderful deeds of grace.

The Genesis narratives are the reflection of the unmerited love and kindness of God who first called a people into being, called them to assemble in His name, and gave them a purpose for being a community of faith in the One True God -- the I Am. Therefore all that precedes this text and all that comes after it is because God, in his grace, first heard the cries of a people in Egypt. God felt the hurt of their pain, the weight of their oppression, the extent of their afflictions, and the injustice in their toil and brought them out of their bondage "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders."<sup>2</sup>

Grace began her work in Egypt and in her unmerited love and kindness is reflected in the creation narrative, the call of Abraham, the other Genesis narratives, the call of Moses, the crossing of the Red Sea, the

possession and settlement of the land of Canaan, the call of prophets, and the setting apart of kings.

The supreme expression of God's grace is seen in Jesus the Christ who is God manifested in the flesh.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.<sup>3</sup>

In Jesus grace became explicit and implicit. Sin was conceived in human flesh; in Jesus, grace destroyed the penalty of sin -- eternal death -- through His death on the cross.

What grace says is that God takes the initiative. Had not God taken the initiative the people now known as Jews/Hebrews would never have come out of Egypt nor have had a story to tell which is called the Old Testament of the Bible. Had God not continued to take the initiative and continued His acts of grace, we would still be in bondage to the penalty of sin. Nor would we ever have the hope of deliverance from terrible experiences and difficult trials. Because God chose to love us in Christ Jesus, we can now choose Him. God in His grace made the first step toward us; now we may walk toward Him. In commenting on how grace

makes the choice possible, Charles R. Swindoll states, "Before Christ, we had no choice. Sin was our only route. . . . Grace freed us from the requirement to serve sin, allowing us the opportunity to follow Christ's directives voluntarily."<sup>4</sup>

The grace, which took the initiative, takes the initiative. This does not mean, of course, that God does not take sin seriously and that we are to sin that grace may abound. The cross is the indication of how seriously God considers sin. Grace is the indication that God is knowledgeable of human finitude and how easily one is victimized by it rather than victorious over it. But here, again, is the amazing element of grace. The same grace that encounters one in guilt also forgives and heals. This is the same grace that gives one the power not to be lured by what is evil and unworthy and to be free from its entanglements.

Grace came in the beginning to deliver. Grace comes to deliver. Guilt is the affliction but grace is the deliverer.

## CHAPTER 6

### Maintaining the Delicate Balance

Guilt feelings among people in the church produce people who know more about feeling guilty than they do of ways to experience release from guilt. When guilt feelings are experienced without an avenue of release, those experiencing such feelings live in denial of any guilt. In so doing they become a torment to themselves and a problem for the church. It thus becomes the task of the preacher to maintain the delicate balance by holding in tension the issues of guilt and grace so that the one who hears such preaching will experience conviction and release through forgiving grace.

One-dimensional preaching produces either the person who is overburdened with guilt or the person who denies guilt through repression. One-dimensional preaching is fire and brimstone preaching which convicts its hearers of sin and leaves them convicted. It fills its hearers with guilt or reinforces the guilt feelings they already have. One-dimensional preaching will inform its hearers about what is wrong with them; but it is at a loss in informing them how to make the wrong right.

It was to such an assembly of people that Jesus addressed these words: "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30 RSV). The people who heard these words were overburdened with a religion which reinforced their guilt by reminding them of how inadequate they were because they could not keep all rules, rituals and regulations.

Another aspect of one-dimensional preaching is just the opposite of "fire and brimstone preaching," that is, preaching which induces guilt feelings or keeps persons in check. The opposite of fire and brimstone preaching is the sermon which says to its hearers: "Let us sin that grace may abound." Grace, such preaching proclaims, is *carte blanche*, therefore no guilt is necessary. It was to such an assembly of hearers that the Apostle Paul addressed these words: "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in sin?" (Rom. 6:1-2 RSV).

Paul also found it necessary to address the antagonism in the church at Philippi when some of its members formed the impression that, with



the advent of grace, law and sin were no longer real concerns; therefore, in their self righteousness, they had achieved a perfection and were the heaven bound elite who only now had to wait at the terminal to be transported to heaven. In the hope that they would get the message that contradicted their view, Paul wrote:

Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature be thus minded; and if in anything you are otherwise minded, God will reveal that also to you.<sup>1</sup>

Preaching, therefore, must strive to maintain the delicate balance between communicating the horrors of human sin and the joy of God's grace. Such preaching aims at conscience raising relative to sin and to release through the knowledge of God's grace. Such preaching holds in tension the awareness that there is wrong and there is a way to make wrong right. Such preaching holds in tension guilt and forgiveness, hurt and healing, estrangement and unity, wrath and love, judgment and deliverance, bondage and release, injustice and justice, and sin and grace, without being biased against one or the other.

The reason, I feel, why people deny guilt through repression is because they know nothing of the experience of grace. Why claim something as burdensome as guilt when there is no release for it? Who feels good about a sickness without a cure. By the same token, people who hold on to their guilt are people who will not believe that God is gracious enough to forgive sin -- that "His grace is sufficient." Were not these two classes of people addressed by Jesus in the Parable of the Prodigal Son? The Pharisees (the elder brother) could never admit any wrong, that is claim any guilt, because God could never love someone unlovable. They knew nothing about grace and therefore claimed no guilt. On the other hand, there were the sinners, publicans and tax collectors (the son who went into the far country) who held on to their burdens of guilt because God's amazing grace sounded too good to be true.

Sample sermons of three preachers are now examined to see how the delicate balance is maintained in preaching. For the purpose of this project, the term holistic preaching, is used because it speaks to the whole need of the person -- the need to know right from wrong, the need to confess wrong, repent of wrong and experience the grace of God in forgiveness. As Elton Trueblood said on one occasion, "Where self

criticism is not possible, self righteousness is inevitable." Paraphrasing Trueblood, it is no less wise to say that where there is too much self-criticism, no sense of being right with God is possible.

### Gardner Calvin Taylor

The Reverend Gardner C. Taylor is the retired pastor of Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn, New York. While pastoring, his congregation exceeded more than 12,000 members. Among many, Gardner Taylor is considered to be the dean of black preachers in America.

In a sermon entitled, "The Soul's Desperate Plea," Taylor acknowledges the polarity between the sin that fosters guilt and the grace that heals guilt when he states:

Situational ethics is a concession to our wickedness and our shortsightedness, but let me say loud and clear God's law remains forever the same: truth is forever truth, lying is forever false, adultery is forever wrong, selfishness is forever destructive, drunkenness is forever self-defeating, and peace-making is forever kin to God.<sup>2</sup>

Again he states in the same message, "God is merciful, but let me not take too much for granted in His goodness. God will protect us, but let us not tempt him in our waywardness. Let me not go too far. Stop me short of the horrible pit -- that fatal step."<sup>3</sup>

Taylor, in the first instance, calls attention to the human temptation to excuse wrong by labeling it "situational ethics," thereby implying that in a given situation anything goes. This, he goes on to point out, is nothing but recapitulating in the face of evil. Wrong is forever wrong. However, in the second instance, he does not leave the offender hopelessly imprisoned to wrong nor helpless to do anything about his guilt. God is merciful; there is mercy with the Lord; there is forgiveness, amendment and restoral. One, however, needs a highly developed sense of gratitude so that God's mercy will not be in vain.

In another sermon, entitled "A New Found Friend," is an illustration of how the delicate balance between guilt and grace is upheld in Taylor's preaching.<sup>4</sup> The new found friend to which Taylor refers is one of the thieves who was crucified with Jesus. One of the thieves rebukes the other, who was also on a cross, for deriding Jesus. The rebuking thief also acknowledged that he and his partner were being justly treated for their crime and asked Jesus to remember him in mercy. Jesus promptly responded by saying, "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise."<sup>5</sup> Taylor then quotes this warning which Alexander McClaren remembered hearing from the pulpit in his childhood days: "One thief was

saved upon the cross that none might despair, and only one that none might presume."<sup>6</sup>

The one who experienced guilt, confessed the guilt he experienced, and changed his mind about Jesus and himself, is the one who encountered grace in guilt -- the healing experience. There is no need to despair over sin; there is only the need to confess it, and turn away from it toward goodness. By the same token, one is cautioned against taking the grace of God for granted. The thief, in this instance, was not condemned to hell for the sins of his past. Nor was he admitted to paradise without confessing them. The grace that brought awareness of guilt also brought release and restoration.

In concluding this sermon, Taylor also makes this point worth mentioning: God's problem, as parent, according to Taylor in a message for parents, is found between God's holiness and God's love. God is holy; God's holiness will not allow God to endure sin. Sin clogs the nostrils of God; He abhors it. I, as a parent, can wink at sin because I am not perfect. This, however, is not possible for God. "God is so holy that he cannot stand sin, but He loves His children so much that He cannot see

them destroyed. His holiness said, 'They must die!' His love said, 'They are your children.'"<sup>7</sup>

Other sermons by Taylor illustrate the need to maintain the polarity between guilt and grace, thus allowing for the hearer to encounter grace in guilt. One such sermon is "The Past as Preparation for the Future."<sup>8</sup> Before the Israelites could be saved at what was later to be called Ebenezer, they had to acknowledge their wrong for placing strange gods before the Lord God. In putting away from them their idols and returning to the Lord "with all their hearts" and admitting they had sinned against the Lord, the Israelites' lives were spared. "The Lord thundered with a mighty voice that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion; and they were routed before Israel."<sup>9</sup> Whenever we experience God's love in His wrath, and God's deliverance in His judgment, we have encountered grace in guilt -- the healing factor.

In a sermon entitled, "A Kind Answer and A Sad Question" (a message on the story of the ten lepers, from Luke 17:12-17), the statement is made, "It is one thing for you, another thing for me, but all of us have something for which we need to cry to the Lord, 'Have Mercy.'"<sup>10</sup> This points to the fact that confession need ever be upon our lips. I think how

easy it is for me to offend my wife, children, friends or congregation without my knowledge. How easy it is for any of us to offend one another unknowingly. If I can so easily offend a fellow human, who is imperfect like me, how often must I offend God who is absolute Perfection, Holiness, Righteousness, Truth and Love? The joy in this is that each can ask for mercy and receive mercy of the Lord. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. . . . He does not deal with us after our sins, nor requite us according to our inequities."<sup>11</sup>

### Paul Tillich

Paul Tillich -- theologian, scholar, preacher -- taught in Germany at the universities of Marburg, Dresden, Leipzig and Frankfurt. In the United States he taught at Union Theological Seminary, Harvard University and the Chicago Theological Seminary. Excerpts from his sermons denote how Tillich maintains the delicate balance between guilt and grace in his preaching.

In the sermon "To Whom Much Is Forgiven" (Luke 7:36-47),<sup>12</sup> are classic examples of the person who feels no guilt because the person does not see God, as God is in Jesus, and therefore cannot see himself as one

is -- standing in the need of forgiveness. Only as we see God as He is can we ever hope to see ourselves as we are. Had Simon been able to see God as He is, then Simon would have been able to see that he, Simon, was none of the things he pretended to be. Simon then becomes the classic example of the one who in his ignorance knows not of his guilt, or the one who in his fear dares not acknowledge his guilt because he knows nothing of the sufficiency of the grace of God. Simon is at a loss to comprehend the love of the woman, who was a sinner, for Jesus because Simon did not know that he needed the same thing from Jesus that the woman received. The woman's thanksgiving was nothing other than her gratitude reaching out beyond her self to its source. Here is also shown a tragic dimension of the inability to feel guilt or to follow it, when felt, to the place of healing. The tragic dimension is this: our capacity to love God is diminished. "His lack of love toward Jesus is not reproached as a lack of righteousness, but is derived from the fact that little is forgiven to him."<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand Tillich, speaking of the woman, says, "It is not the love of the woman that brings her forgiveness, but it is the forgiveness she has received that creates her love."<sup>14</sup> In reference to the woman, Tillich continues by stating:



Jesus does not forgive the woman, but He declares that she is forgiven. Her state of mind, her ecstasy of love, show that something has happened to her. And nothing can happen greater to a human being than that he is forgiven. For forgiveness means reconciliation in spite of estrangement; it means reunion in spite of hostility; it means acceptance of those who are unacceptable, and it means acceptance of those who are rejected. Forgiveness has the character of "in spite of," but the righteous ones give it the character of because.<sup>15</sup>

To her credit, the woman who was a sinner was not burdened with guilt because she did not believe that the grace of God was too good to be true. In her is seen the joy and release which can come to one when sin is seen for what it is and grace is accepted for what it does. Only when the delicate balance is maintained between guilt and grace can this manner of healing occur.

Another of Tillich's sermons, entitled "You Are Accepted," acknowledges the presence of sin but, more importantly, the greater presence of grace. Tillich makes the cogent statement relative to the painful nature of sin -- "Sin is separation."<sup>16</sup> Sin separates friend from friend, neighbor from neighbor, a person from himself and a person from the "Ground of Being"<sup>17</sup> -- God. Since sin is separation, hell, then, is what one experiences in his separated state. How can being separated from the things that nurture, sustain, support and protect life not be hell?

According to Tillich, sin is more than an immoral act, if in fact it is that. Sin is worse than a corporate act; it is a state of being whose by-products reflect its estrangement from the source who can stimulate a finer and better life.

Whereas sin is separation of life from God, grace is unity of life.<sup>18</sup> Herein he upheld in the sermon the ugliness of sin and the pain of its consequences -- separation and the beauty of grace and the joy of its consequences -- unity. In speaking of grace, Tillich says that grace is just as difficult to describe as sin:

In *grace* something is overcome; grace occurs "in spite of" something; grace occurs in spite of separation and estrangement. Grace is the reunion of life with life, the reconciliation of the self with itself. Grace is the acceptance of that which is rejected.<sup>19</sup>

The point of all of this is: because the deficiency of sin is no match against the sufficiency of grace, you and I can know that we are accepted -- "in spite of."

Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we were estranged. It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It

strikes us when year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: "You are accepted. You are accepted."<sup>20</sup>

### Richard Lamar Horton

Three messages from Isa. 6:5-7, Luke 15:17-19, 22 and John 8:3-5, 10-11 will be presented to illustrate how this writer, in preaching, strives to maintain the delicate balance between guilt and grace, neither swaying to the right or left. Only as preaching proclaims the whole gospel can preaching hope to make whole persons.

#### From Distress to Joy

And I said woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips; and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the king, the Lord of hosts! Then flew one the seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin is forgiven." (Isa. 6:5-7)

What a relief it is to know that I (or any other preacher) do not have to establish a foundation for maintaining a balance in preaching between guilt and grace or sin and forgiveness. One such example is the scriptural

text above. In the Holy Scripture, the foundation is already laid. We need only to be faithful in building upon the foundation laid out for us.

As I view the series of events encountered by Isaiah in the temple, I am led to see that the story tells us more about God's grace than it does about Isaiah's sin and guilt. It was the infinite power of grace that enabled Isaiah's finite mind to see and comprehend "the Lord high and lifted up." Isaiah did not encounter grace, grace found him; he did not discover grace; grace discovered him. Grace is the seeker and the finder; the human creature is the resposdee. Isaiah was able to experience God in the temple because he was experienced by God. Was it not Augustine of Hippo who said: "We could not even begin to look for God unless He had already found us." But for the grace of God, the Isaiah of every generation cannot see God, cannot know when we are seeing God, cannot behold His holiness nor be made aware of our wretchedness. Grace comes to us so that we may be in communion with one another, ourselves and God.

God in His grace acts first, but, we do not have to respond positively to the prompting of His presence. Grace comes to us in our guilt, saying: "I have come to release you;" "I have come to cleanse you;" "I have come to

tabernacle with you;" but we do not have to respond. Grace comes to smooth out the rough places, straighten out the crooked places, raise us to a higher plain, but we do not have to respond. Not to respond is not to go from distress to joy.

It is one thing to complain about our predicament in life; it is another thing to do something about it. Isaiah chose to respond to the grace that encountered him in his guilt -- I am in distress; I am lost; I am unclean; I am responsible for where I am. What a temptation it is to place the blame on other people, places and things -- to blame parents, race, gender, circumstances. But that does not bring about the healing experience which grace brings to the guilt encounter.

Grace took the initiative. Isaiah responded to the initiative of grace. His woe became joy; his distress became happiness. Only to the degree that we accept what we are, and where we are, can we know where we can be and where we can go. Only as we see who God is can we know what we can become. Only as each of us in the church confesses the wrong in each of us, and is cleansed and forgiven, will what is wrong in the church disappear. The healing experience, which grace seeks to bring about when it encounters us in our guilt, necessitates each one to first say in the words

of the hymn: "Not my brother, not my sister, but it's me O Lord, standing in the need of prayer." This is how the grace of God takes us from distress to joy.

### Convicting Guilt, Pardoning Grace

I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as your hired servant. . . ." But the Father said to the servants, "Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." (Luke 15:18-19, 21-24)

There are many people who are convicted of their guilt and they and their guilt remain imprisoned in the state of conviction. I would often say to my wife that this or that is wrong. Her response would always be, "What are you going to do about it." This was the response of the younger son in this parable told by Jesus. One does not necessarily need to be imprisoned by what convicts him. One, however, will certainly imprison himself if he ignores or represses his wrong doing that is known to him.

"I will arise; I will go; I will say I have sinned." The pardoning process begins when one decides the need to rise above the habits that betray him and the ideas and purposes that dishonor him. The pardoning

process begins when one is determined to leave the place that was against the soul's well-being. The pardoning process begins when one says, "I am wrong and I want to change." There is a line in a hymn that we sing at the place where I pastor. It states, "the Lord will make a way somehow." It does not infer that everything depends on God and that the believer has no role to play. The line from this hymn implies that somehow, as human will and Divine Power cooperate, a way will be made out of no way and the impossible will become possible. The younger son seems to have understood this. Do we?

Guilt then serves as the agent of God's purpose to get one to focus on a problem and to lead or awaken one to the grace that is available to pardon and restore. This becomes all the more evident as the younger son is met by the father. Once his sin was confessed, words of pardon are heard. When people confess their sins they do not need our judgments because, by their admission, they have already judged themselves. Each time we confess our sins we are restored to our relationship with God, neighbor and self. This is symbolized in the parable by the robe, the ring and the shoes. Confession of sin relieves guilt and gives us back our honor, our moral authority, and our son-ship and daughter-ship. We are

no longer dead in trespasses and sin but alive to walk in newness of life. Our eyes are opened to the joy and merriment around us and our deepest hungers are satisfied; our deepest thirst is quenched as we "feast on the abundance of the Father's house and drink from the river of His delights."

For sin there is pardon; for guilt there is forgiveness; for the returnee to the Father's house there is welcome. Grace brought the younger son to himself. By grace he was convicted of sin. Grace was sufficient for him. Grace was made perfect in his weakness -- empowering him to rise up, go, and confess. Grace was also there to receive and restore. Encountering grace in guilt is experiencing the guilt that convicts and the grace that pardons.

### The Boomerang of Sin

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?" . . . Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again." (John 8:3-5, 10-11)

The boomerang used by the Australian cowboy is a fascinating, if not beautiful, sight to behold when it is tossed into the air and makes its rhythmic moves. This boomerang, which is fascinating to see when tossed



into the air, is not enjoyable to behold when it begins its downward dissent toward the one who tossed it out with a deadly force. The boomerang returns to the one who flung it.

Sin is like that. Our sins will find us out. This lesson was learned several centuries ago by the Pharisees and scribes who brought a woman to Jesus caught in the act of adultery. What a delight, it seemed to them, to toss this woman's sin before Jesus in public. But when her sin came back to them with their names on it, it was not a beautiful sight to behold. How often do people, in going through another's closet, find some of their things there. Is it not true that when we point one of our fingers at someone else we have four fingers pointing at ourselves? It is dishonest to confront another about certain wrongs without putting one's own wrong on the table also. Without doing this, there is no way to have a conversation with integrity. The scribes and the Pharisees were confronted with the fact that sin is always personal. And, if one delights long enough in the sin of another, he will soon be confronted with a sad reminder of his own. Sin is to be confessed; guilt is to be acknowledged. Absolution and healing does not come by singling out in others what we despise in ourself. They come through facing in us what disturbs us about

ourselves and confessing and acknowledging these faults. Regardless of how much wrong we find in others, in the final analysis, what is wrong in us will still be there.

So we are told, "When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest." Do you suppose they left in a descending order from the eldest to the youngest because the older we are the more we have to confess? Again, without digressing too much, there is the need to say here how glad I am that Jesus wrote whatever he wrote on the ground. In so doing He gave us one less thing to theologize and to denominationalize over.

In regard to the woman, in the guilt of her sin, grace encountered her. "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again." Grace brought her to Jesus. Grace revealed the boomerang nature of sin to her accusers. Grace called her to her human excellence with compassion. How fortunate for her that they brought her to Jesus, even though their motives in bringing her to Him were wrong. But, here again, the grace of God takes the evil schemes of people and works these to His glory and for our greater good. Had they not brought her to Jesus,

she would never have encountered grace in her guilt -- the healing experience.

Amazing grace will always be my song of praise, for it was grace that brought my liberty; I do not know just why He came to love me so, He looked beyond my faults and saw my need. I shall forever lift my eyes to Calvary, to view the cross where Jesus died for me. How marvelous the grace that caught my falling soul, He looked beyond my faults and saw my need.<sup>21</sup>

Preaching which does not maintain the delicate balance is preaching that has style but no substance. Preaching which does not maintain the delicate balance offers problems without solutions, solutions without problems, answers without questions, and questions without answers. Preaching that is faithful to the gospel it proclaims speaks of sin and salvation, guilt and grace, ungodliness and godliness, the profane and the sacred, indifference and devotion, infidelity and fidelity, the finite human creature and the infinite God, the ephemeral nature of humankind and the eternal nature of God. In so doing, responsible preaching seeks to call humankind to accountability for its behavior and also create an atmosphere where the grace of God can operate to convict of sin, heal guilt through forgiveness and protect against anything that would corrupt and destroy the soul's well being. The lack of such preaching leaves one burdened with unbearable guilt or guiltless through denial or repression.

The church is troubled by both types of people when this delicate balance is not maintained. I cannot cite the source, but no truer words were spoken than these: "The greatest sin is to be conscious of no sin."

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Encountering Grace In Guilt:**

#### **The Healing Experience**

For the past five chapters, the writer has dealt with the subject matter of this project from a theoretical perspective by citing authorities in the fields of psychology, theology and homiletics such as Sigmund Freud, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Gardner Taylor, to mention a few.

Now the writer will discuss the subject of this project from a practical point of view. The intention is to illustrate the kinship of theory and practice in the project and how they come together to benefit and to help.

The writer will do this by first pointing out the meaning of the grace -- guilt encounter and the resultant consequences. Attention will next focus on the importance of identifying the encounter between grace and guilt. Four areas of this encounter will be identified. There is a minimum amount of quotations from noted writers and authorities in this chapter. Due to the intention to integrate the theoretical with the practical in this chapter, the writer will draw upon episodes from his own personal experience, which are germane to the subject under discussion,

material supplied from a survey conducted among the members of his congregation.

To encounter grace in guilt is to experience relief from pain, freedom from bondage and death, and to know resurrection. It is also to experience a sense of unity with significant others from whom one has felt alienation, a feeling of joy that dispels despair and an enabling courage to face the fears from whence one has formerly run. The encounter of grace in the experience of guilt feelings is again valuable because it develops a healthy attitude towards the problem of guilt.

When feelings of guilt are faced, grace is the experience that gives insight into the true nature of one's guilt by revealing its true or false nature. By grace one can determine whether the feeling of guilt is false guilt that has no objective reality or guilt feelings that are real, in that they are subjective and objective and need to be confessed. Grace is the encounter which is sufficient enough -- which assures acceptance by God and therefore acceptance of self.

According to the observations and personal experiences of this writer, many persons in the church seem to feel that God began to love them only after they had confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, only after they

were baptized, affiliated with the church, began to dress well, speak correctly, and serve the church through their time, talents and resources. For those who think this way, this necessary reminder is needed: "God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."<sup>1</sup> Grace was extended to us not because of but "in spite of." The grace that knew us before we knew ourselves, and without which we can never know ourselves, will accept us "in spite of." One thing the symbol of the cross says clearly is this: "I already know the truth about you."

The positive attitude one gains through the encounter of grace in guilt is that guilt is not to be avoided but accepted, because the guilty one is accepted. Another insight one gains through the encounter of grace in guilt is the understanding that whatever guilt feelings are awakened by the preaching of the gospel can also be relieved through that preaching. For the church, when her preaching is faithful to the gospel, awakens persons to their wrong and directs them to the source who forgives the past, amends the present, and directs the future. The preaching of the church which is unfaithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ produces guilt, but does not relieve it. Worse still, worshippers who are victimized by unfaithful preaching are like hopeless sinners in the hand of a punitive destroyer

called God. In the experience of guilt feelings, the awareness of grace is the difference between self confidence and self hatred, courage and cowardice, knowledge of Jesus as Lord and Savior or knowing Him only as Lord and Judge. Peter and Judas both knew Jesus. But when Peter denied Him, he went away and wept bitterly. Judas betrayed Jesus and went away and hanged himself. Could it be that Peter knew Jesus as Lord and Savior -- judge and deliverer -- while Judas knew Him only as Lord and Judge -- judge and destroyer? It stands to reason that one knew the ugliness of sin but also the beauty of grace, while the other knew only the ugliness of sin which had no means of redress.

### **Identifying the Encounter**

The experience of grace in guilt is essential if guilt feelings are not to control and dominate one's life. Essential to the experience of grace is also identifying the medium (experience) through which grace comes. Preaching is the medium which creates the grace event. The writer preached on four themes. They were: (1) Grace: Free and Unmerited Favor and Love of God; (2) Grace: Divine Influence Acting in One's Life to Restrain Him from Sin; (3) Grace: The Force that Reconciles the



Estranged; and (4) Grace: The Experience of Pain Which Teaches Valuable Lessons Which Joy Cannot.

In this preaching experience, the atmosphere was created, for the persons whose accounts are to follow, to identify the grace-encounter and to experience healing release from guilt in the process. Too often God's grace is missed because the receiver of His grace is limited by thinking relative to the varied and many ways God comes to bless. One is quick to identify God's grace with the experience of joy, but who can see pain as an instrument of God's grace? Had this writer been in Jerusalem on what has come to be called Palm Sunday, there would have been no problem identifying that what was going on had something to do with God. However, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to think that God's grace had everything to do with what happened on that day which is now called Good Friday.

#### **Grace: Free and Unmerited Favor and Love of God**

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all people, but it is because the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of bondage.<sup>2</sup>

For by grace you have been saved through faith and it is not your own doing, it is the gift of God -- not because of works, lest any man should boast.<sup>3</sup>

In a society which recognizes self-made men and women, grace as a free and unmerited gift of God's love and favor is a problem. In one sense the problem lies in abuse. There is nothing more easy to violate than goodness -- especially kindness which is continually shown in spite of cruelty, compassion shown in spite of arrogance, and tenderness extended in spite of ruthlessness. In another sense, the problem lies in ingratitude. "The fruits of ingratitude grow from the seeds of forgetfulness." The source of this quotation is beyond recall, but it nevertheless speaks to the heart of the problem raised here in relation to grace. The person who professes to be self-made forgets the truth that a person had to be created before any accomplishments could be achieved. Persons who profess to pull themselves up by their boot straps fail to acknowledge the source of the boots and the straps. Abuse and ingratitude are two problems the human creature has with God's free and unmerited favor and love.

This becomes all the more evidence when this concept of God's grace contradicts the way things operate in the political arena, the market place, the social order, and the world of religion. How unfair it seemed to have

a quota system, related to minorities and women, in the hiring policies of government run and financed organizations, and in admissions guidelines of professional schools. How else would grace right the wrongs committed by previous generations to people who were few in number and powerless to act on their own behalf? What employer or labor union would agree that the person who worked for one hour in a day should receive the same compensations as the person who worked for twelve hours? (See Matt. 20:1-16.) Only the grace of God can be there for His people when circumstances or injustices prevent them from being their for themselves. When the framers of the Constitution of the United States, the landed gentry, came together without representation from the Native Americans, women and other minorities, grace was present to inspire thoughts and suggest decisions so that an all-inclusive document was produced which has stood the test of time -- defending the rights of persons who were not present to speak and act for themselves.

Grace is a word more easily spoken than understood; grace is a word more easily conceived than perceived. Grace is more often asked for than recognized when it comes. In the abuse of God's grace, in ingratitude toward God's grace, in the inability to perceive grace operating in the

affairs of men, grace encounters the abuser, the ungrateful, and the ignorant, and the response depends on the understanding of the encountered. When one is convinced that he is the source of all he is and all he has, grace encounters him in his ingratitude; his response depends on his capacity to appreciate what grace is doing in the encounter. Grace comes to challenge thinking so that one is enlightened to see that a coincidence may not be just coincidental. As Bernie Seigel has well said, "Coincidence is just God's way of remaining anonymous."<sup>4</sup>

The writer of chapters 40-55 in the Book of Isaiah saw more than a Persian General defeating a Babylonian King. He saw Cyrus, the Persian General, as God's instrument to liberate His people from Babylonian captivity.

In 1972 one of the least of God's socially significant persons, a security guard, exposed a covert effort to sabotage the democratic electoral process in this country. History records the incident as the Watergate Scandal. But for the grace of God, a nation of people would have lost one of their most sacred and honored privileges -- the right to participate in the decision-making process which directly affects their lives. For a nation of people who were not aware at the time that one of their most valued

privileges was about to be undermined, grace intervened and saved the day.

When one thinks more highly of himself than he should, grace comes to say to him: You're being is not because of but "in spite of." A minister of my acquaintance tells the story of a time when he had to travel from Detroit to Kansas City to preach a revival. He was due to begin the revival on a Sunday night. However, his pastoral responsibilities kept him in Detroit most of that Sunday. Finally, physically exhausted and mentally fatigued, he caught a plane and arrived in Kansas City just in time to be rushed to the church and ushered into the pulpit to address the waiting congregation.

To his amazement, the physical energy, the mental alertness, and spiritual anointing was there in such abundance that he and those who shared the preaching event experienced pentecost revisited. Some made a first confession at the invitation to Christian discipleship, while others came forward to rededicate themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ and His Church.

After the worship celebration, the minister said to himself, "If I did that well when I was as tired as I was, I can't wait until tomorrow right

after I am rested; I will really show them something tomorrow night." Tomorrow night came. He was well-rested; he strutted his stuff. The worship service was a flop. In fact, he recalled that some of the deacons went to sleep and were snoring so loudly that he had to pause in the message and have someone awaken them so that others could hear what he was saying.

When a person feels that the gift to preach is from himself/herself, grace comes as a reminder that "we have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us."<sup>5</sup> As the revival preacher later remarked, "I failed to realize that only God's grace could have empowered me in my helpless state to do what had to be done and to accomplish what had to be accomplished. I made the mistake of taking credit for what only grace could have made possible."

This writer is aware of a woman who was told that she would never be able to have children because of an abortion and the way it was performed. In her forties, when she had abandoned the hope of having a child, she conceived and gave birth to a daughter who has since finished college and is now practicing law.

In her guilt over the abortion, the woman had reached the conclusion that God was punishing her. But grace encountered her in her guilt and she felt forgiven and accepted. Given the doctors' opinions, this woman was convinced that God had shown favor to her in a manner which defied explanation. Of course, germane to the central thought of this project is the understanding that God, through grace, had already forgiven her and that she is accepted whether or not she had conceived a child. This is what has to be communicated if guilt is to be healed. The who/what to blame problem is adequately dealt with in the Book of Job and in Chapter 9 of John's Gospel. God, "in spite of," gives what one cannot earn, does for one what he can never deserve. It has nothing to do with what one brings to the relationship with God (nothing is used here because grace and faith are gifts from God), but has everything to do with what one receives in the relationship. It is not what one has but who God is, not what one offers, but what God shares that makes the difference.

The following stories are personal illustrations of instances when grace was encountered by the writer. On Monday evening, September 26, 1938, a decision had to be made regarding my mother's pregnancy. The doctor informed my father that my mother could not possibly give birth to

me and live. Both the doctor and my father agreed that everything had to be done to save my mother's life, at the expense of mine. But, as the story goes, I just "slid out." "Thou art he who took me from my mother's womb."<sup>6</sup> After my birth I remained in the hospital for six months, due to pneumonia and its side affects, before I could be taken home. As a child I had seizures and developed a speech impediment. It became doubtful whether I would ever speak clearly. In high school, a speech therapist was assigned to my school and he worked with me in a special way to help me overcome this problem.

Another encounter with grace occurred after I became an adult. Gladys Ruth Abner-Horton and I were married very young. We are now in our thirty-second year of marriage. She has truly been an invaluable companion, helper, friend and lover. It appeared that the early marriage ended all hope of realizing my dreams of becoming a minister, completing college, and acquiring a graduate theological education. But, while selling insurance in Detroit, Michigan in 1960, I met a minister who befriended me and who also became president of Texas College in Tyler, Texas. He made it possible for me to complete my college education. While working as a school community coordinator with the Detroit Board of Education,



an occasion arose when I was introduced to the late honorable G. Mennen Williams, former governor of Michigan, Chief Justice of the Michigan State Supreme Court, and heir of the Mennen products company. He funded a position for me at St. Paul's Cathedral (Episcopal) and made it possible for me to receive a graduate degree in theology.

The other story is one of a corporate bestowal of grace. Three and a half years ago I resigned a position at a church and was without a job or a continuous source of income. A minister invited me to preach at his church the Sunday after I left my former congregation. I thanked him for the invitation but respectfully declined his offer because my wife and I desired to go away that weekend. Also, I personally had planned not to preach for awhile but to find a solitary place for reflection and renewal.

The minister of that church and I both agreed that I would not be there that Sunday. However, a local paper carried my picture and the announcement that I would preach. Persons from my former church saw the article and spread the word that I would be preaching. The pastor and I talked again and I felt compelled to preach. It was for me an inner compulsion.

After the worship celebration, I was asked if I would teach a Bible study class on Sunday afternoons for persons who were primarily members of the congregation I had left. The class was scheduled in the afternoon so that it would not interfere with the morning worship celebration of the participants' churches.

The study group began with forty-two people; the next week there were sixty-seven. On Friday, March 13, 1987, one hundred and eight people met and organized the Eternal Promise Baptist Church and extended to me a call to become its first pastor. I accepted. The first worship celebration was held in a very small building, formally used as a restaurant, with ninety seven people attending. Eventually, the congregation moved to the backyard of this facility to accommodate the people and rented a tent as a shield from the sun. Three months later the congregation moved to a funeral home to accommodate the increasing membership. In inquiring about another church facility, I was informed about property owned by the Presbyterian Church. On July 15, 1987, the congregation leased the property. On January 19, 1990, Eternal Promise Baptist Church purchased the property which consists of an acre and a half of land and four buildings.

Not to me only, but grace came to a people with whom I am affiliated and assured us that our significance lies not in the fact that we chose God but in the fact that God had chosen us -- making our choice possible as well as all the blessings that accompanied the choice. In my personal smallness and insignificance and in the smallness and insignificance of the corporate life of which I am a part, it was demonstrated what the grace of God will do in His kind, unmerited love and favor -- yes, even giving the gift of faith which alone makes it possible for the response of the heart to reach out in gratitude to the source of its thanksgiving.

Another person tells this story. A man had put his house on the market and began to look for another residence. In the process he began to experience much frustration over not knowing where he would live after his house was sold. Still perplexed over the matter he said, "I came home one day still uncertain over where I wanted to locate. My wife said to me, 'When you cannot make a decision the Holy Ghost will intercede for you.'" This man relates that he was invited to a friend's home and became lost trying to find the address. "While driving trying to find my friend, I got lost. I came upon an area being developed. There I found the home and the area where my wife and me wanted to relocate." He found a buyer for

his present home, and it successfully closed escrow. He and his wife are in their new home -- satisfied and relieved. "When you cannot make a decision the Holy Ghost (grace) will intercede for you."

Another person writes, "I was feeling unloved and insignificant when I was overseas in the armed services. I contracted, along with a buddy of mine, spinal meningitis. My buddy died. But God's grace touched my life and I made it through this contagious disease." When in one's smallness, one feels the pull towards greatness, or when in one's sense of insignificance, one feels a new sense of worth, or, when, through ignored by society, one feels included in a joyous fellowship, embraced by a fulfilling love, upheld by an affirming presence, one has encountered the free and unmerited favor and love of God doing in him what he cannot do for himself.

### **Grace: Divine Influence Acting in One's Life to Restrain Him From Sin**

"My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness."<sup>7</sup>

Much is said about the doctrine of original sin relative to the human creature being tainted by the sin of the first parents -- Adam and Eve. The doctrine of the fall teaches that the human creature is essentially good but

also inherited a proneness to sin. Like infants who come into this world addicted to drugs due to the fact that their parents are drug users, so is humankind tainted with the rebelliousness of its first parents. Like infants who come into this world alcoholics because they are tainted with the addiction of their parents, so is humankind corrupted with the corruptibleness of its first parents -- a proneness to rebellion and disobedience.

The problem, however, arises in this matter when the fallen nature of humankind is emphasized to the exclusion of the power available to it to overcome evil with good. Preoccupied with its fallen nature, humankind finds reasons -- if not excuses -- to be content with evil. In this regard I overheard a conversation between a clergyman and a layman on the matter of sin. The clergyman said to the layman, "I should not be judged too strictly when it comes to sinning. After all, I am just an ordinary person like you." The layman replied, "No you are not just an ordinary person like me. Society grants you special privileges which it does not grant me. For instance, you can go in and out of hospitals and jails at times when I cannot. You are accorded hospitalities in the social arena which I am not and people trust you with their husbands and wives,

children, secrets and monies in a way that I am not trusted. You are not just ordinary in the sense that extraordinary things are expected of you." When man's weakness is emphasized to the exclusion of the power of grace available to him to overcome his weakness, he is content to be the helpless plaything of whatever betrays or dishonors him. Therefore, what has also to be stressed is the grace which says that divine help is available to strengthen human weakness. In this respect, I present six personal accounts of the intervention of grace and the recognition of its power.

I went through a low period in my life. It was during my first marriage and grace helped me to get through it without killing my first husband.<sup>8</sup>

Another person writes,

I can attest to the grace of God in my time of weakness. I was in a very destructive marriage situation and His wonderful grace empowered me to get out. I could see Him moving all along the way. And he made possible, though the pain, great strength, joy and peace.

Other persons related these accounts:

I was brought up not to commit suicide because God forgives for everything. But in my earlier life I didn't think like I think now. My morals were so low that I started to burn to death my son, my mother-in-law and my ex-wife in the house while they slept. Now I realize that it was God's grace that was with me then, restraining me. God, in His grace, gave me a strong wife and mother who stayed with me until I was delivered from that frame of mind. Grace encountered me in my weakness

and enabled me to see that I had a new baby and wife who loved me and showed me how they cared for me along with God who first cared. Grace brought me through because with God all things are possible.<sup>9</sup>

It was by the grace of God that I was released of the obsession to do drugs, smoke cigarettes and overeat. These are all destructive habits that God, through grace, has taken from me. Grace continues to do for me daily what I cannot do for myself. I now enjoy peace, joy and love by the grace of God. A miracle has happened; I am free at last.<sup>10</sup>

God's grace did keep me from destroying myself through mind altering substances and serious bouts with depression I suffered therefrom. God's grace and my families' prayers saved my life.<sup>11</sup>

The power to resist temptation is available. Grace is the power and influence to keep the "lid on the id." In the struggle with one's self one is aided in the struggle. In unbearable circumstances, strength comes to do what one has to do and to bear what one has to bear. In temptation a way out is made available. When decisions have to be made and sorrows have to be borne, suggestions come and comfort is given. This is none other than the encounter of the grace of God as the divine influence in one's life to restrain one from sin. The encounter of grace at this time is to assure one that he is not left alone to be victimized by forces too strong for his puny, unaided strength.

A preacher once remarked that God works through human weakness; that is all He has to work with. A woman respondent to the statement said, in disagreement, "I believe that God works through the teleios of the person -- that is, her inner aim." She then supported her statement by quoting Matt. 5:48, which states: "You therefore must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."<sup>12</sup> "God," the woman suggested, "has more to work with than our imperfections. He has our inner aim, our desire, our goals, our intention to be like Him in righteousness, justice, mercy, love and concern." Grace is the support one receives in his striving not to yield to sin and his aim to be like God.

### **Grace: The Force That Reconciles the Estranged**

And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything I restore it four fold. Today is salvation come to this house since he is a son of Abraham."<sup>13</sup>

It is obvious to all who read Luke 19:1-10 that Zacchaeus climbed into the tree to see Jesus because there was no way to see Him through the crowd. Nevertheless the symbolism of Zacchaeus in a tree is still rich in suggestion.



One of the things the story of Zacchaeus suggests is that sin will distance us from God and that the guilt feeling experienced, due to sin, will cause us to avoid God out of a sense of unworthiness. However, at that very moment, God's grace in Christ Jesus encounters us by calling us down from whatever tree into which guilt-feelings have propelled us and says "Come down; you are accepted" -- you do not have to live estranged from God. Sin is not stranger than forgiveness. Sin is not more abundant than grace.

In 1976 when Queen Elizabeth celebrated her Twenty-Fifth Jubilee Anniversary, she decided to honor those persons who had served England well. In compiling her list of honorees, the Queen included the name of John Profumo. Profumo had to leave his office due to a sex scandal. Eventually he became a social worker in the slums of England.

One can imagine the joy in his heart at receiving the invitation to attend the Jubilee celebration and at being informed that he would be honored for services rendered on behalf of England and the crown.

Grace encountered John Profumo in his estrangement in the form of Queen Elizabeth's invitation and said to him "You are accepted" -- reconciliation is a reality -- you can rejoice again, find hope again, and

experience the reaffirmation of your worth and dignity as a person again. Grace encounters one in his guilt at the very moment when one feels separated from the good in him (God) and needs to feel reconciled to God.

A similar experience is had by another person as is born out in this personal account.

I had been involved in a marriage that was built on material things. Money had become more important to me than anything. I had failed to give God credit for my financial wealth. I was looking for instant gratification in everything. The marriage soon turned into a very abusive relationship, both physical and verbal. My spouse began to hold money from me when he saw he could no longer control my thinking, coming and going. I then turned to falsifying documents, writing checks, when I knew there was no money in the bank (hoping my husband would change his position and save me). I started lying to people and became very manipulative. After my husband became a full-fledged monster, I committed adultery, looking for relief in the arms of another man. My situation only got worse. I had hit bottom and my only way out was to holler, scream and cry for God's help and forgiveness. Most of all his guidance. I slowly put my priorities into order, with God at the top of the list. I learned to depend first on God, then on myself and not on someone else. I learned that all the wrong I had done others I had to pay for, even double. "Nothing is free," except the love God has for us.<sup>14</sup>

Grace is the force that reconciles one when she becomes estranged from the good in herself. Grace is the power that encounters one in his sin and its resultant guilt feelings and says come down from the place of alienation

and experience the wholeness of mind and spirit which can be yours.

Finally, there is this account:

There was a time when my morals did not stand as high as they do now and during that period of my life I felt as though God did not exist, or existed but was not available to me. However, by grace, I did not stray so far that I could not come back because of the foundation my parents laid for me in the church was still imbedded in me and haunted me (grace) until I could no longer ignore its presence or the fact that my behavior was no longer acceptable.<sup>15</sup>

### Grace: The Experience of Pain Which Teaches Valuable Lessons

#### Which Joy Cannot

Affliction you gave me was the best thing that could have happened to me, for it taught me to pay attention to your laws. They are more valuable to me than millions in silver and gold.<sup>16</sup>

There is a Chinese proverb which says, "When the pupil is ready to learn, the teacher will come." Nothing gets one's attention like pain and the only time one makes significant changes in his life is when not changing is too painful. There is a readiness to learn in the afflicted moment which is not there in times of ease and comfort. Yet the pain which teaches the valuable lesson is no less the grace of God which one experiences also as joy, when joy does the most good. As one writer

expresses it, "We may not know why pain has so large a place in human life, but we have discovered a way of turning it into a blessing."<sup>17</sup> The statement is further corroborated by this testimony:

I experienced the grace of God in a painful moment -- the painful moment I encountered from my second husband's wife and part of his family during the course of my first full-term pregnancy. Thank God for what I learned and for bringing me the long way He has brought me. He has, by His grace, taught me and brought me through thick and thin. I thank God for my pastor, my church, my family and my friends.<sup>18</sup>

Another person writes:

The painful lesson that God's grace taught me and brought me through was the closing of the negative but fruitful chapters of my life . . . and to face the responsibilities that the negative but fruitful chapters in my life had laid upon me. God has brought me through and truly demonstrated that "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."<sup>19</sup>

Grace, as the experience of pain which teaches the valuable lessons which joy cannot, is again affirmed when the theologian states:

Sorrow becomes the expositor of mysteries which joy leaves unexplained. Defeats teach us humility when success would leave us insensitive and proud. The tragedies which threaten to blight our joy become the source of our deepest understanding.<sup>20</sup>

The Judaic-Christian tradition is replete with persons who reached self-actualization through grace's divine wounding. Jacob became Israel through a divine wounding in the hallow of his thigh (Gen. 32:28). Job

would never have realized that all piety must be disinterested piety (that is, one can have a reciprocal relationship with God) unless he had been afflicted in the way he was and thereby driven to reflect more deeply on the awe, wonder, mystery and miracle of life. Assuming that one can credit David with the Twenty-Third and Fifty-First Psalms, only such a masterpiece as Psalm Twenty-Three could come from one who had been a shepherd and knew the capability of a shepherd to protect and deliver the sheep from lions and bears -- and to attain victory over the Goliath of life. In the valleys and shadows, the deep dark experiences of life, the divine wounding comes and one is blessed by the grace of God that teaches through pain and delivers through conflict. The pain of being convicted of the evil done to Uria and Bathesheba produced in David and for future generations the Fifty-First Psalm, which has been an invaluable aid in helping one get in touch with and express his penitent feelings.

The seven demons who possessed Mary Magdalene led her to Jesus who set her free of them and in the process gave to Jesus a close, loyal and devoted friend and companion who was the last to be with Him at His death and the first to be with Him at His resurrection -- in fact the first to proclaim the gospel that "He is risen."

The grace of God in the stoning of Stephen the deacon, though tragic and painful, caused the Christians to scatter from Jerusalem (where they had become too comfortable) to carry the gospel to Judea, Samaria, and eventually to the end of the earth in fulfillment of the directive Jesus had given them.

The internal, perhaps painful struggle of Saul of Tarsus over the lack of the internal peace and contentment he witnessed in those Christians whom he persecuted and killed, coupled with his Damascus Road experience, is Paul's story of grace teaching him through affliction the lessons comfort could not communicate. Incidentally, Paul, like Jacob, received a new name to go with the new life he received through his divine wounding.

Out of the internal pain and struggle of Mozart and Beethoven, grace has given the world musical masterpieces. Out of the enslavement of an African people grace has produced the Afro-American spirituals and a rich worshipping experience. Out of his painful internal struggle, Vincent Van Gogh gave the world priceless art. Through the search for "peace with God through Jesus Christ our Lord," God gave the world a religious reformation through Martin Luther -- which also rekindled in others the

desire for reform and gave to the world and its people the manifold means of celebrating our religious unity through diversified but meaningful ways.

The civil rights legislation on the books today took the death of President John F. Kennedy, and the advancement of Afro-Americans and minorities alike took the death of Martin Luther King, Jr.

In discussing grace as the teacher, which through pain, struggle and turmoil blesses with insight growth and understanding, it is important to make a point which is drawn from a nursery tale. The nursery tale is that of Chicken Licken -- known in some circles as Chicken Little. It is said that "One day an acorn fell from a tree and hit Chicken Licken on the head. Chicken Licken thought that the sky was falling down."<sup>21</sup> Pain is like that. The pain of grief can hit one and make him feel as though the sky has fallen. Anything that afflicts, perplexes, persecutes and cuts one off from life's joys and comforts hurts. And, that which hurts will make one feel as though the sky has fallen. When one mistakes the pain of a fallen acorn, though acorns hurt (defeat, sorrow, disillusionment, failure), one is likely to panic and lose his perspective. When one cannot see the grace of God working for one's good, even in pain, one will easily mistake an afflicting experience as the end of hope.

The nursery tale mentioned above illustrates what happens in the real world when one panics in pain and loses perspective -- the perspective "that in everything God is working for good for those who love him and who are called according to his purpose."<sup>22</sup> Paraphrasing from this point, the story goes like this. When hit by the acorn, the pain caused Chicken Licken to panic and lose perspective. He in his pain and bewilderment caused others to buy into his helplessness and hopelessness. They were Henny Penny, Cocky Bocky, Ducky Lucky, Drakey Lakey, Goosey Loosey and Turkey Lurkey. The end result in all of this is that there is always someone ready to exploit someone else's panic and loss of perspective. The one in this instance was the villain Foxy Loxy. In real life it is the drug pusher, the over abundance of liquor stores in the inner-city, the escape into sexual promiscuity, victimization by flem-flam people, or other forms of addictive behavior or escapes into passions that betray, and ideas and purposes that dishonor. Foxy Loxy is always there to lead one to his den where self-destruction is a certainty when one cannot distinguish between an acorn -- temporary pain, instructing pain, correcting pain, enabling pain -- and the fallen sky -- permanent and eternal destruction. The pain of the changing conditions and



circumstances have caused some to seek a permanent solution for a temporary problem -- suicide.

There is a theory that an acorn is an unborn tree. A misunderstanding is but an understanding in the making. Suffering is the power of endurance in the making; endurance is character in the making; character, forged through suffering, is hope in the making. Hope, born out of suffering, endurance, and character, is the safeguard against disillusionment in the making.

The grace of God -- God's creative, redeeming, sustaining power -- is the affirming power, the relieving power, the renewing power, the enabling power that encounters one in his guilt feelings and says, "You are O.K." Grace is also that which makes forgiveness possible and enlightens one with the ability to distinguish between false guilt and true guilt, and to confess and repent of the wrong actually done but not to be bound and hindered by imagined wrong. When preaching is true to the gospel of Jesus Christ, guilt and grace are held in tension and the delicate balance is maintained. The hearer then goes away neither an antinomian (one who feels that since grace is in such abundance one is licensed to sin that grace may abound) nor a guilt ridden, hopelessly condemned sinner.

Grace comes as the unmerited kindness and favor of God, and the sufficiency and strength needed in one's weakness, so that one is not overwhelmed or consumed by destructive forces. Grace comes as the reconciling power that reconnects one with the good in himself (God) from which he has become estranged. It is important to note here that God, in His grace, takes the initiative in the reconciling endeavor. Grace is the necessary pain which comes to teach, enlighten, correct and redirect -- love in pain's clothing doing what is required of love. When pain is viewed as needless punishment, one is not likely to benefit from its help. But when one, in a spiritual pilgrimage, seeks enlightenment in pain through acts of spiritual discipline and devotion, one is shown that the grace that makes one to dwell in the "green pastures and beside the still waters" is also the grace that comforts. It is the grace that removes the fear when one must "walk through the valley and the shadows" and enables one to "feast on the abundance of God's house and drink from the rivers of His delights."<sup>23</sup>

The personal testimonies in this chapter point to the fact that what is needed in the church is for pastors to do some consciousness raising in two areas: (1) Pastors must reaffirm that the good news is forgiveness and

remission of sin; and (2) Pastors must enable their congregations to see how grace is already at work, healing and restoring in the four ways addressed in this project. The grace which heals individually also heals corporately. In so doing an atmosphere is established in the church where grace will be encountered in guilt and healing will take place. Salvation will come to God's people in the place where God is worshipped -- in the place where God's people live out their lives and relationships.

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